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Lumières, Fall 1985

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LUMIÈRES

A Chance Occurrence:

Memories of Clarence John Laughlin

I first learned of the late Clarence John Laughlin's photographic work in 1970, when John Palmer, the last business manager of the old *Southern Review*, invited me to his apartment at Yale for dinner. His dining room was lined with bookshelves. My attention focused on Clarence's first book, *New Orleans and the Living Past*, a signed limited edition published by Houghton Mifflin in 1941. Eight years later, again back at Yale, and again dining with John Palmer in the same room, I suggested that we should go hear Clarence give his first lecture at that university. I was fascinated by "The Third World of Photography," and still have notes in which I described each image Clarence showed. Clarence insisted that relationships are not due to chance; the surrealist photographer has an obligation to record precisely the visual content of the so-called chance occurrence.

I told Clarence afterwards that I taught at LSU and asked about bringing him from New Orleans to LSU when I returned in the fall. He said he would love to, and that though he had lived in New Orleans since 1910, he had never been invited to LSU. Subsequently, in December 1978, I invited my future wife Lubna on a first date. I said I wanted to visit Clarence and Elizabeth Laughlin in their home, to discuss the possibility of bringing Clarence to LSU to lecture. Dur-

ing the visit, I had Clarence personally inscribe my copy of *New Orleans and the Living Past*.

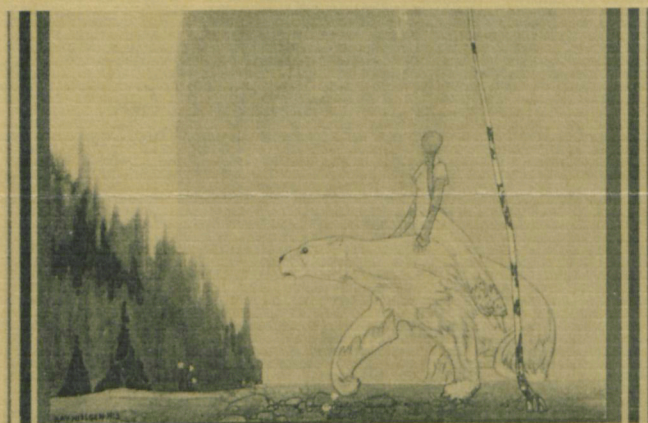
The visit to Clarence's house turned me into a book collector. I had come to talk about photography and a possible lecture, but was first taken into Clarence's library of 30,000 volumes. He showed me what I considered to be the most beautiful illustrated book I had ever seen—the signed, limited edition of Kay Nielsen's *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1914. I held the book in my hands, admiring the vellum binding, the hand tipped color plates, and listening as Clarence proudly explained how Nielsen designed every page of this masterpiece. I now have my own copy of this fabulous edition, but Clarence bought his before Nielsen was fashionable.

Clarence's lecture at LSU, in February 1979, saw two of the most faithful Friends of the LSU Library in the front row—Pete Taylor and Max Goodrich. Both recognized the importance of making Clarence understand that his library would find a good home at LSU. Thein Swe and George Guidry made several visits to Clarence's home, as did Anna Perrault, but all efforts to come to some definite decision were stymied by Clarence's disinclination to part with his "children." I went along on several of these trips, and nobody could persuade Clarence to get specific. His

letter to me of October 7, 1979, is worth quoting in part because nothing had changed at the time of his death in January 1985:

So far, I have not been able to do anything about offering my library for sale to any institution. For the simple reason that, as of now, the huge task of unpacking over 800 boxes, and organizing the library, remains only about half finished. . . . Nose and throat allergies I have had have been getting slowly worse—to the point that I can sleep only about half the time I am in bed—because of coughing, wheezing, and choking. I have no help in lifting the heavy boxes of books (usually about 40 to 70 pounds each)—and, also, on the higher shelves in the 14' high room—I must get on a ladder and physically lift the heavy art, etc. books into place—there is no other way available to me. And I always have the danger of falling, because of my arthritic knee.

There is no way for me to estimate, right now, what I would like to get for the Library, or what it is worth approximately. But one of my basic purposes is to keep the Library (which I think is unique in Louisiana) out of the hands of dealers. . . . I now suspect that [the] total number of books may be 30,000 or more. And, of course, there are many rare items.



"And flitted away as far as they could from the Castle that lay East of the Sun and West of the Moon"

Clarence returned to give a second lecture at LSU in 1981, but as years went by, I despaired of seeing the collection come to Baton Rouge. I underestimated the energy and dedication of Sharon Hogan, who negotiated with the estate in the spring of this year. Now the collection is here, though cataloging it will take some time. We still do not have a complete list of what is in the collection. This is a daunting task for any librarian.

Everyone who ever wrote about Clarence John Laughlin referred to his being his own worst enemy. I suppose everyone was right. His wonderful wife Elizabeth embroidered a hanging for the bedroom which says something obvious to all who ever met or dealt with Clarence: "It takes genius to live with genius." Clarence was a genius; and I only met him when he had reached an age which asks the young to accept one's personality as fixed. He always thought of himself as a book collector first, and a photographer second. His lack of a high school education can scarcely explain his fascination with books, though it might tell us something of his passion for teaching himself. His photography is known to everyone in this state through his *Ghosts Along the Mississippi* (1948), still selling as well as ever. Thanks to the Friends of the LSU Library, his collection, particularly strong in surrealism, science fiction, and illustrated books will enormously strengthen Middleton Library's holdings in areas in which it had not been strong.

Clarence believed that chance counted for much in this world: he believed some "third" force explained my meeting him. It seems fitting to give Clarence the final word, both about his approach to photography, and an intuitive explanation for why his library has come to LSU:

My central position, therefore, is one of *extreme romanticism*—the concept of 'reality' as being, innately, mystery and magic; the intuitive awareness of the power of the 'unknown'—which human beings are afraid to realize, and which none of their religious and intellectual systems can really take into account. This romanticism revolves upon the feeling that the world is far stranger than we think; that the 'reality' we think we know is only a small part of a 'total reality'; and that the human imagination is the key to this hidden, and more inclusive, 'reality.'

David Culbert
Professor of History

The Clarence J. Laughlin Library of the Arts

The LSU Library has been able to acquire, with the assistance of matching funding from the Friends of the LSU Library, the collection of the late New Orleans photographer, Clarence John Laughlin. The 30,000 volume collection was amassed over a fifty-year period by Mr. Laughlin, who described his collecting philosophy as acquiring "the work by, and on, those people with extraordinary imaginations (in all fields) and the exploration of the nature and the far ranges, of the creative (works) of fantasy and the importance of fantasy in human lives."

The term "fantasy" is broadly interpreted in the range of subjects in the collection. Although the major theme is the fantastic in the arts and literature, topics represented in the collection range across the alphabet from alchemy, an-

tiques, cats, cards, comic books, cemeteries, on to memory, mysticism, pop and op art, sexology, utopias, vaudeville, and witchcraft.

The Laughlin library is an extensive collection of science fiction, fantasy, and mystery literature from the late 19th century up to the present. The list of authors whose entire output is represented reads like a Who's Who for those fields. The collection is also particularly strong in illustrated books, including Arthur Rackham, Edmund Dulac, Kay Nielsen, and Frank Papé. The Laughlin Library is a significant addition to the LSU Library collections, adding prestige in areas in which the LSU collection has not heretofore been strong.

The Literate Tiger

The 10th annual Friends of the LSU Library Book Bazaar held September 26-28, 1985 at the LSU Agricultural Center's 4-H Mini Farm Barn got off to a roaring start with Mike the Tiger (a.k.a. Dennis Smith) entertaining an increasingly lengthening line of customers which eventually stretched almost to the lakes. Book bazaar publicist Bill Holtman arranged media coverage for a ribbon-cutting ceremony, with LSU System president Allen Copping wielding the scissors assisted by the 1985 book bazaar chairman, Mrs. John Noland. Also attending the ribbon-cutting were LSU Agricultural Center Chancellor H. Rouse Caffey, Director of the LSU Libraries Sharon A. Hogan, and Friends President Mrs. John West, III. As the ribbon was cut the dignitaries stepped aside quickly in the face of an onslaught of eager book buyers rushing through the doors.

It was apparent in the first few hours that the 10th annual Book Bazaar would be a record breaker. The three-day sale realized more than \$35,000, an increase of several thousand dollars over previous sales. Income from textbook sales brought the 1985 Book Barn/Bazaar gift to Middleton Library to \$40,000.

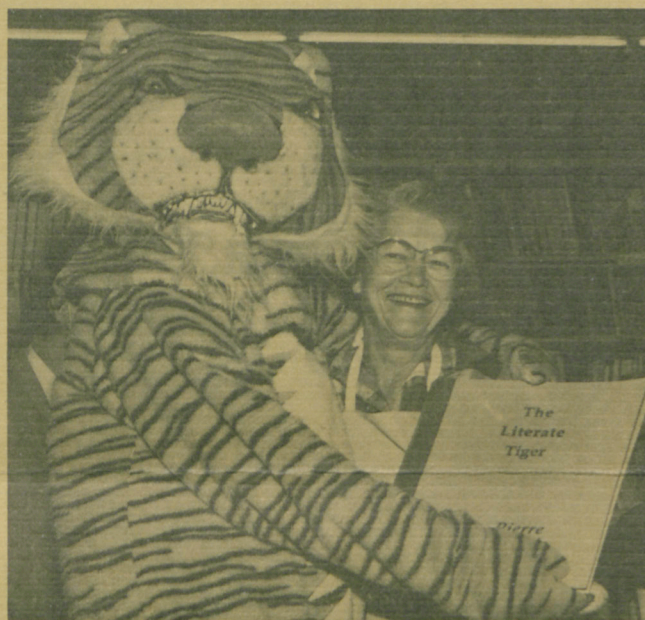
The 1985 book bazaar was staffed by a large group of volunteers who worked ferociously carting books and stacking tables. The effort was led by the book bazaar officers: Mrs. John Noland, chairman; Mrs. John Keenon, secretary; and Mrs. Raymie Edmonds, treasurer. The entire crew needed to maintain the coffers was made up of assistant treasurer, Mrs. Warren Dixon Millican; Thursday cashier chairman, Mrs. William E. Edrington, Jr.; Friday cashier chairman, Mrs. Iverson B. Noland; and Saturday cashier chairman, Mrs. William Fruehan. Responsible for staffing the sale was volunteer chairman, Mrs. John S. Campbell,



1985 Book Bazaar chairman, Mrs. John Noland, hands President Allen Copping the scissors for the ribbon cutting while Chancellor Emeritus Cecil Taylor looks on.

Jr., and co-chairman Mrs. John J. Glover. Sales chairman was Mrs. Douglas P. Harrison; arrangements chairman, Mrs. James F. McDowell, and co-chairman Mrs. Trent James. Mrs. Charles Bryant Smith served as liaison. Book Barn chairman was Mrs. Eugene Owen with Mrs. R. Gordon Kean as co-chairman. Book collection chairman was Mrs. Thomas Lane with Mrs. Charles Prosser as co-chairman. Mrs. Robert Holtman was publicity chairman; Mrs. Cary Long was in charge of campus publicity. Mrs. John Gonce was stockroom chairman with Mrs. T. O. Perry as co-chairman; Mrs. Chauvin Wilkinson served as information chairman. The hospitality chairman was Mrs. Norman David with Mrs. Michael Hoseman as co-chairman. Transportation chairman was Mrs. John M. West, III, with co-chairman Mrs. Delroy Spann assisted by Caroline Wire.

In this outfit if you do a job well they give you one in which you can work harder. Mrs. Douglas Harrison has been rewarded with the chairmanship of the 1986 book bazaar.



Mrs. Catherine Reames gets a hug from Mike as he shows off his exclusive Book Bazaar limited edition of one—"The Literate Tiger."



Shortly after the ribbon-cutting, the floor was crowded with buyers.



The joint appearance of special guests of honor Cleanth Brooks (left) and Robert Penn Warren (right) delighted party guests.



Cleanth Brooks (left) was welcomed back to LSU by Chancellor James Wharton and LSU Board of Supervisors chairman Mrs. Helen Crawford (right).

50th Anniversaries Celebrated

The Friends of the LSU Library gave a reception honoring the 50th anniversary of *The Southern Review* and the LSU Press in the newly renovated Hill Memorial Library on Tuesday, October 8, 1985. The party was on the eve of the opening of the conference "Southern Letters & Modern Literature" sponsored by *The Southern Review*.

Literary notables invited as readers and speakers for the conference attended the reception along with Friends members, university administrators and faculty, and the staffs of *The Southern Review*, the *LSU Press*, and the *LSU Library*. Local guests were especially delighted that the original editors of *The Southern Review*, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, attended the party. The *LSU Collegium Musicum* enhanced the already elegant ambience of Hill Memorial's north reading room with renaissance music. The party was a gala affair made possible through the efforts of volunteers who supplied sumptuous food and hours of work. As an event taking place just a week after the most successful book bazaar in the organization's history, it also served as a celebration of the Friends' achievements.



Miss Elizabeth Spencer (left), another special guest for the Literary Conference, enjoys the party with Dr. and Mrs. Jack May (center) and *Southern Review* co-editor Lewis Simpson.



Party co-chairman Mrs. Douglas P. Harrison (left) got the chance to chat with Mrs. T. Harry Williams (center) and Mrs. John Loos (right).



The *LSU Collegium Musicum* entertained guests in Hill Memorial's north reading room.

Photos by Don Morrison

Hill Memorial Library

The new Hill Memorial Library may surprise those who are familiar with the building as the "old" library on campus. The old building, worn and tattered by sixty years of service to the University—first as its main library and then as a classroom and office facility—has been specifically remodeled to house and service the prestigious special collections of the University libraries. It has all the facilities necessary for collecting, preserving, and providing access to the rare and often expensive materials which support research in the humanities and social sciences and historical research in the sciences.

The facade, which faces the west side of Middleton Library, was enhanced with the addition of an arched stucco portico, more firmly tying Hill Memorial to the dominant architectural theme of the original buildings on the central campus. The massive marble entryway and grand staircase has been opened to the second floor above, inspiring in the visitor an immediate sense of the grace and elegance of the edifice. The first floor, which once housed offices and classrooms, now features the facilities to support the public functions associated with an ambitious special collections program: a large exhibition gallery where exhibits interpreting the library's holdings to the University community and the general public alike will find a suitable home, and a spacious multi-purpose room, suitable for lectures, meetings, and receptions. On the second floor of the building flanking a central lobby are two grand reading rooms, featuring towering ceilings, arched windows, ornate wooden columns and beams, and impressive chandeliers. The dark rich wood in these rooms is well complemented by the lighter tones of recessed ceiling and striking mauve carpet. Taken altogether, the public areas on the first and second floor of the building succeed admirably in conveying the value and importance of the materials which are housed

and serviced here.

But equally important to the building's success are the areas which the public does not see: the stacks and work areas. The special collections materials now located in Hill Memorial Library are housed in six tiers of self-supporting metal stacks. These stacks are protected by a complex Halon fire suppression system; in the event of a fire the system will automatically flood the area with an inert gas which would extinguish the flames without harming the books. The physical security of the collections is insured in other ways as well, including a sophisticated electronic security system and an elaborate tandem air-conditioning system which ensures that both temperature and humidity remain stable within the suitable limits for fragile papers.

The basement of the building provides spacious offices and working areas for the staff, including a manuscripts processing area, a conservation work room, a freezer vault for the storage of microform masters and photographic negatives, and a complex of darkrooms and processing areas housing the library's microfilming and photographic preservation activities.

Among the special collections which are housed in the new facility are the Louisiana Collection, the Archives and Manuscripts Collection, the Rare Book Collection, E. A. McIlhenny Natural History Collection, and the Warren L. Jones Lincoln Collection.

Members of the Friends are welcome to visit our newest and most prestigious library facility.

*Robert S. Martin
Assistant Director of
Libraries for Special
Collections*

Memorials

In memory of:

Mrs. Dorothy Baird
by Dr. and Mrs. Max Goodrich

Mr. Robert P. Breazeale
by Mr. and Mrs. R. Gordon Kean, Jr.

Mr. Herbert Kenneth Brewster
by Sociology Department Faculty and Staff

Mrs. C. W. Hair
by Book Barn Friends, Mrs. Nora Eskridge Grigsby,
Mrs. Delmar Gulick, Miss M. Margaret Jameson,
Mrs. Ruth Jameson Snipes

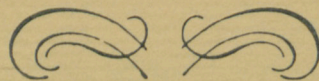
Mrs. Edith F. Hill
by Mrs. Florinell F. Morton,
LSU Library Staff Members

Dr. John A. Hunter
by Dr. and Mrs. Paul W. Murrill

Father of Jurgen Hurrelbrink
by Dr. and Mrs. Pierre Conner

Mr. Tom Ogden
by Mr. and Mrs. R. Gordon Kean, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. W. D. Millican

Mr. P. Chauvin Wilkinson
by Book Barn Friends, Mrs. Nora Eskridge Grigsby,
Mr. and Mrs. Henry K. Groves,
Mr. and Mrs. John B. Noland



Classes of Membership

- ☐ A. Student Member (annually) \$2.00
☐ B. Regular Member (annually) \$10.00
☐ C. Contributing Member (annually) \$25.00
☐ D. Individual or Corporate Patron Member (annually) \$100.00
☐ E. Patron Member (annually) \$500.00
☐ F. Life Member \$1,000.00 or more or the presentation of unusual and distinctive materials valued at \$3,000.00 or more, within a calendar year.
☐ G. Institutional or Corporate Member (annually) \$500.00
☐ H. Honorary Life Member

☐ Check payable to LSU Foundation for Friends of the Library

☐ I prefer to pay as follows: _____

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Officers

Mrs. John M. West, III, President
Mrs. Delroy O. Spann, Vice-President
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